Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/religionofshakes0000unse_v5s5

THE RELIGION OF SHAKESPEARE

GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION LIBRARY 1961

BY

GEORGE SEIBEL,

Author of "The Mormon Saints," "The Fall," "Bacon versus Shakespeare," "The Wine Bills of Omar Khayyam," etc.

HOLBROOK LIBRARY PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION

Property of CBPac Please return to Graduate Theological Union Library

LONDON:

WATTS & CO.,

JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, E.C.4

1924

BZ4.2
Y525

PR
3011
S44
1924

49345

Printed in Great Britain

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. A Man of Many Masks	1
II. Was Shakespeare a Catholic?	6
III. In Shakespeare's Library	12
IV. Shakespeare and the Bible	16
V. Sonnets, Epitaph, and Will	21
VI. Preachers and Ideal Men	27
VII. Hatred of Hypocrisy	32
VIII. No Need for Providence	36
IX. Jests at Heaven and Hell	41
X. Was Shakespeare a Spiritualist?	45
XI. Agnostic and Rationalist	53
XII. War of the Critics	60
XIII. Squaring of the Creeds	65
XIV. "This Was a Man!"	69
Index	74

Which of you did I enable
Once to slip into my breast,
There to catalogue and label
What I like least, what love best,
Hope and fear, believe and doubt of,
Seek and shun, respect—deride?
Who has right to make a rout of
Rarities he found inside?

—ROBERT BROWNING
("At the 'Mermaid'").

I

A MAN OF MANY MASKS

To define, from the works of his pen, the personal opinions of a dramatist, if he is a good dramatist, should be almost impossible. It may be done with a playwright like Bernard Shaw, who lurks behind each of his characters, or one like Alexandre Dumas fils, who usually introduces some personage as the mouthpiece of his own convictions. But if the characters created by the dramatist are true to themselves, they will not meekly think his thoughts nor merely utter his words. For this reason the dramatist must have a protean personality; he must be capable of all heresies, competent for all crimes, no less than he should be attuned unto all holiness and every good work.

No dramatist has ever possessed this multiple entity, this contradiction of faculties, this universal sympathy, in so marvellous a measure as Shakespeare. This view of his character is obviously shared by his brother and sister dramatists of our day. Clemence Dane, in her fine "Will Shakespeare," lets him kill Kit Marlowe; while H. F. Rubinstein and Clifford Bax, in their "Shakespeare," picture him as placing the mysterious Mr. W. H. behind the arras, during a rehearsal of "Hamlet," to skewer him instead of Polonius.

The poet's universal sympathy is painted in less

gory colours by the novelist William Black, who wrote "Judith Shakespeare," and put into his heroine's mouth this beautiful characterization of her father :—

> If you are in distress, that is enough; he will not ask you whence you come, nor has he censure for any one; and that is a marvel in one who is so good a man himself, that he hath never a word of blame for any one, neither the highwayman.....nor a lesser criminal.

Shakespeare was probably like his Malcolm, who "would not betray the devil to his fellow." He had sympathetic insight even into devilishness, not being "righteous overmuch." So he understood all, and justified Coleridge's epithet of "myriad-minded." In view of this it would be absurd to quote words of Cardinal Wolsey as proof of the dramatist's piety, or words of Iago to show his wickedness. Iago, indeed, utters some of the most unctuous platitudes of virtue; thus :—

> Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
> Is the immediate jewel of their souls.
> Who steals my purse steals trash.....

making it clear that Shakespeare knew very well how prone the most arrant knave is to mouth the most sanctimonious maxims. He also put upon the tongue of Polonius, foolish and garrulous, and none too rectilinear, counsels that exude the smug cant of Samuel Smiles. Shakespeare knew that honest men do not talk too much about honour, nor is a sincerely religious soul addicted to long and loud prayers.

If we realize all this, it must be obvious that any attempt to deduce Shakespeare's religious creed, if he had any, from the three dozen plays will be beset with the utmost difficulty. "As a result of his professional

attitude," declares Brander Matthews, " and perhaps also of a personal reticence peculiar to Shakespeare, we do not know his religion or his politics." It might not even be safe to accept the assumption that Shakespeare intended to portray himself in Prospero, whose farewell to his magic arts has been supposed to symbolize the Bard's retirement from the dramatic scene to the pastoral of New Place, from the turbid Thames to the placid Avon.

Yet there is one principle that may easily be accepted for guidance on any such delicate quest. No firm and fanatical believer could be quite fair to the other side. Ardent faith must ever be intolerant. There can be no compromise with Baal or Beelzebub. It is easy to imagine how John B. Gough, the temperance crusader, would have depicted Jack Falstaff, or how Saint Anthony Comstock, America's moral inquisitor, might have painted Cleopatra! Instead of babbling about green fields, the Knight of the Tankard would howl in ophidious delirium, while our dauntless new Galahad would have introduced the inhibitive asp in Act I.

Goldwin Smith sets forth this principle effectively in his essay on " Shakespeare, the Man ":—

> There are things which strike us as said for their own sake more than because they fit the particular character; things which seem said with special feeling and emphasis; things which connect themselves naturally with the writer's personal history. There are things which could not be written, even dramatically, by one to whose beliefs and sentiments they were repugnant.

Such considerations impress upon us one major point—whatever he was, Shakespeare was no gloomy

dogmatist, no icy ascetic, no dull other-worldling, who disdained the secular concerns of life, and measured all things by the rigid rule of some cramping creed. He must have been a man who understood the proud motto of the Roman poet, Terence: "Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto!" (I am a man, and think nothing human to be foreign unto me). "If we tire of the saints," says Emerson, "Shakespeare is our city of refuge." "No church can claim him," declares Richard Grant White. "He was not a religious man," imagines Professor A. C. Bradley; "all was for him, in the end, mystery." And Victor Hugo proclaims that

> Shakespeare thinks, Shakespeare dreams, Shakespeare doubts. There is in him something of that Montaigne whom he loved. The "To be or not to be" comes from the "What do I know" of Montaigne.

In harmony with this view is the abundant evidence afforded by the plays that their author was a reader both of Boccaccio and Montaigne. He did not read them to confute or to refute, as an Origen read Celsus or a Lambert read Ingersoll. He borrowed joyous plots from the one, and imbibed sceptical philosophy from the other. When he wished to describe an ideal commonwealth, through the lips of a sage and benevolent statesman, Shakespeare copied almost verbatim the words of the great essayist. Gonzalo, in "The Tempest," proclaims:—

> No kind of traffic
> Would I admit: no name of magistrate:
> Letters should not be known: riches, poverty,
> And use of service none: contract, succession,
> Bourne, bound of land, tilth, vineyard none:
> No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil:

No occupation, all men idle, all:
And women too, but innocent and pure:
No sovereignty.....
All things in common Nature should produce
Without sweat or endeavour: treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine
Would I not have: but Nature should bring forth
Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance
To feed my innocent people.

It may be noted that in this ideal commonwealth there is neither priest nor chapel; Nature is mentioned twice, but God not at all; in fact, it is just such an anarchist paradise, without catechism or police-force, as William Godwin or Count Tolstoy would have delighted in.

"Shakespeare," says Sidney Lee, "is no comfortable theorist, no respecter of orthodox doctrine, no smooth-tongued approver of fashionable dogma. His acute intellect cuts away all the cobwebs, all the illusions, all the delusions, of formulæ." In other words, he was a rational and radical thinker. Yet the attempt has often been made to show him a devout Catholic, an orthodox Calvinist, a believing Christian.

II

WAS SHAKESPEARE A CATHOLIC?

Upon some passages and incidents in "Hamlet," relating to Purgatory and the Confessional, the argument has been based that a writer holding such views must have been a Roman Catholic. "Get thee to a nunnery" sounds like Catholic counsel. Chateaubriand, who himself might be classified as a romantic Catholic, believed that Shakespeare was an adherent of the historic Church. The far-fetched theory was elaborately set forth in "The Fortnightly Review" by W. S. Lilly, who assured his readers that it is certain Shakespeare's youth "was passed amid Catholic influences, for there seems no room for reasonable doubt that his father was 'a Popish recusant,' and suffered many things as such. In Mr. Gillow's 'Bibliographical Dictionary' mention is made of a very ancient Catholic tradition that he was 'reared up' by an old Benedictine monk, Dom Thomas Combe, or Coombes, from 1572. This is the more probable as it would account for the knowledge which he possessed of things Catholic, and especially of Catholic philosophy. That he was married in a Protestant church, and that he was buried in a Protestant church, proves nothing about his religious opinions or practices." Mr. Lilly generously admits "there is no evidence that Shakespeare practised the Catholic religion during his lifetime. Whatever may

have been his private leanings toward it, I think it probable that he occasionally attended the Protestant services prescribed by law."

To balance the account, Dr. Thomas Carter, another zealous proselyter, has converted Shakespeare into a Puritan. But, indeed, the incidents and much of the text in "King John" and in "Henry VIII," if these plays be by Shakespeare, might as easily be taken for proof that he was a subscriber to "The Menace," a journal devoted mainly to Popish plots and monastic immoralities. Indeed, we know that he had read Harsnett's "Egregious Popish Impostures," for he took from it the names of the devils in "King Lear."

Juliet refers to evening mass, and this has been offered as evidence that Shakespeare was clandestinely a Catholic. It might easier be held to prove the contrary, though Frank Mathew, in "An Image of Shakespeare," adduces a book of Martene's in proof that mass was sometimes said in the evening, though condemned by Pope Pius V, who died in 1572. But aside from all this, we might as well hold, because Brutus objects to taking an oath, that Shakespeare was secretly a Quaker.

No one has been more sweeping and emphatic than the Rev. Sigourney Fay, a professor at the Catholic University of America, in a lecture on "The Renaissance and English Literature," which claims Shakespeare as a Catholic. With dogmatic assurance Professor Fay announced:—

> Recent researches have made known to us so much of the private life of William Shakespeare that we now can affirm with assurance that he was a Catholic,

> and that he went to the Protestant church only to save his skin. His father was a good Catholic, and he too was a firm believer in the faith; so the fact that he went to a Protestant church to avoid persecution was not a very grievous sin. He never mentions a Protestant clergyman in his plays except to make fun of him. He never mentions a Catholic priest except with sympathy. Moreover, he shows a deep knowledge of the Church, and a feeling for her which could be the possession only of members of the Church.

But Cardinal Wiseman, who really knew and loved Shakespeare, makes no such claim in his admirable tercentenary lecture dictated a few weeks before his death. A copy of the Second Folio of 1632 found its way to Spain, and was expurgated by a Jesuit named Guillén Sanchez for the English College at Valladolid. He tore out "Measure for Measure" entirely, and left untouched only nineteen of the thirty-six plays in the volume. That inquisitor had no suspicion of Shakespeare's Catholicism!

Most tenuous of all the arguments to prove Shakespeare a Catholic was that advanced by the Frenchman Montegut, based on Lorenzo's poetic words to Jessica, that heaven is "thick inlaid with patines of bright gold." M. Montegut is a literalist, to whom "the patine is that round golden plate which is presented for the kiss of the faithful in the sacrament of the Mass," so he insists that we have here "one of those thousand and one details in Shakespeare which hark back to the ancient Catholic civilization and betray the poet's Catholic origin."

This is truly turning "trifles light as air" into "confirmation strong." Suppose Shakespeare had been as thoroughly versed in Catholicism as, let us

say, Erasmus? Would that make a Catholic of either? To draw another parallel: Will any one seriously contend, calling in the Weird Sisters of "Macbeth" as witnesses, that Shakespeare believed in witchcraft? Perhaps he did, being a child of his age; but that was not his reason for introducing the Witches on the blasted heath; they were brought in because they were picturesque and gave a shiver to the groundlings at the Globe. Because Hermione is vindicated by a very anachronistic oracle from Delphi, it does not follow that William Shakespeare worshipped the Pythian Apollo. The same sort of evidence that convinced Chateaubriand of Shakespeare's papistic faith told the free-thinking Swinburne that he was a Free Thinker, while the Italian Lorenzo makes him a Buddhist. It is easy to prove anything to yourself if allowed to select your evidence and ignore all arguments on the other side.

Some time between 1688 and 1708 Archdeacon Richard Davies, Vicar of Saperton in Gloucestershire, added some biographical notes about Shakespeare to others made earlier by another clergyman, and closed with the words: "He dyed a papist." Upon this Father Bowden built a laborious argument to prove that Shakespeare was a Catholic. But we know that Shakespeare was baptized, and had his children baptized, in the Anglican communion; and only a few years before his death he lodged with a Huguenot family in London. His works, moreover, disprove any Catholic affinities, aside from such sympathy as a fair-minded man would feel for the "under dog."

A Catholic would never have penned the scurrilous simile, "as the nun's lip to the friar's mouth," in

"All's Well that Ends Well." If Shakespeare was a Catholic, would he marry the neophyte nun Isabella to the Duke in "Measure for Measure"? Would he, in the same comedy, refer to "a woman cardinally given"—a play on the word "carnally," in allusion to a Cardinal sent to Henry VIII who was caught in a bad house? Would he let one character with no absolute necessity speak of "Popish tricks and ceremonies"? Would he permit an eloquent denunciation of the Pope as a "meddling priest," and of indulgences as "corrupted pardon"? Would he let a representative of Rome paint assassination as meritorious, and have King John poisoned by a monk? Would he let Rosalind compare the touch of "holy bread" in the Mass to a lover's kiss—which so shocked Samuel Johnson that he turned it into a "holy beard"? Would he cast a slur upon "self-loving nuns" in his earliest published poem?

Archdeacon Davies does not fare very well among critics and biographers of Shakespeare, excepting Halliwell-Phillipps. Sidney Lee dismisses the "irresponsible report" as "idle gossip." When we consider its inherent improbability and the fact that the note was written nearly a century after Shakespeare's death, the legend looks about as plausible and trustworthy as would be a statement made by a preacher in Ohio during the 1876 Centennial that George Washington died a Mohammedan.

Shakespeare shows his religious neutrality in "All's Well that Ends Well," where the Clown mocks impartially both at "young Charbon, the Puritan, and old Poysam, the Papist." These names were likely derived by punning on "chair bonne" (good

meat) and "poisson" (fish). For Shakespeare, indeed, the dietetic aspect of religion had many humorous suggestions. He puts up a jesting argument against the conversion of Jews, because it would raise the price of bacon. That is a sample of his thought on missions, no less than on fasting.

III

IN SHAKESPEARE'S LIBRARY

But what of Shakespeare's intellectual appetite and mental pabulum? From the books of which he was fond we may gather an authentic impression of that. In his library were historical works like Holinshed and Plutarch, sprightly romances of various Renaissance writers more gay than godly, and reflective treatises which rarely fell into an austere and hortatory mood. Significant in even greater degree are the books of his day and age which Shakespeare did not read. Evidently he was not addicted to such blood-curdling but saintly literature as Foxe's "Book of Martyrs"; he did not apparently revel in the works of "that learned and judicious divine, Mr. Richard Hooker"; Bishop John Jewel's "Apology for the Church of England," which Lady Bacon had translated into the vernacular, had not left any imprint upon his thought and style. But he read Ovid and Rabelais and Straparola; he knew Hakluyt, and Magellan's "Voyage to the South Pole"; he delighted in Sidney's "Arcadia," and relished Chapman's Homer as Keats did; he hated Lyly's Latin Grammar with a healthy human hate. His fairly omnivorous reading habits did not lead him to swallow such dry morsels as the sermons of "silver-tongued Smith," or the hot pamphlets of "Martin Marprelate," or the sacred puns of Lancelot Andrewes—whom Milton

mourned, or the Biblical plays of bilious Bishop Bale, who wrote "A Tragedy or Interlude Manifesting the Chief Promises of God unto Man." It may truly be said that the books a man does not read also afford a certain index to his mind.

"The Poet's Own Prayer-Book" was found in 1864 —his *own*, if we may put any faith in three signatures scattered through it. His name is on the inside of the cover, at the end of the prayers, and a third time after the Confession of Faith. The book was printed in 1596, and under one signature is the date 1600, while in another place the words "Stratford-on-Avon" can still be traced. No critical authority considers the signatures genuine; they are too numerous, too obtrusive, too legible, and in all ways justify Hamlet's innuendo, "The lady doth protest too much." One signature might beget faith; two would cause us to marvel much; but three overreach coincidence and credit in anxious effort to convince us. Then, too, we are left to wonder how the book got to Shropshire, where it was found: perhaps Shakespeare left it lying in the pew of some church or chapel at Shrewsbury when he went to get local colour for his battle scene. If they had looked further, they might also have found the poet's own catechism, where Hamlet got the phrase of "pickers and stealers" for his hands.

As we smile at this suggestion, we may ask if Shakespeare went oft or ever to church. His calling as a player was not calculated to bring him into close contact or genuine sympathy with the Church or its representatives. The player was almost an outlaw, whom the clergy regarded with a horror no doubt intensified by the thought that his frolics drew greater

crowds than their homilies, and that the shillings he gathered in were lost to the Lord's treasury. The Rev. John Stockwood unblushingly reveals the influence of such economic determinism in his jeremiad: "Will not a filthy play, with the blast of a trumpet, sooner call thither a thousand than an hour's tolling of the bell bring to the sermon a hundred?"

Only a few years before Shakespeare's birth Parliament had forbidden actors intermeddling with religious matters. They were classed along with "vagabonds and masterless men" as fit for service on the galleys. Pestilent fellows, the players were not tolerated within the city! Over and over the Puritans inveighed against the godlessness of the drama, the sinfulness of profaning Sundays and holy days by such performances, the incitement to vice and debauchery offered by the gathering of crowds. Thomas Wilcocks preached a sermon in 1577 declaring that "the cause of plagues is sin;.....the cause of sin are plays." The dramatist Lodge felt called upon to write a "Defense of Poetry, Music, and Stage Plays."

Reverend prelates thundered maledictions against the poor mimes, while rigorous magistrates had them whipped and put into the stocks. It would have been an extreme demonstration of ideal Christianity if, in obedience to the injunction, "Love your enemies..... pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you," any actor or playwright of that age had gone to church and become devout. To impute piety to Shakespeare, it must be done by paradox; as the German scholar, Max J. Wolff, gravely writes, with tongue in cheek, that "Shakespeare was a pious

man like Goethe." Even so! A pretty pair of saints!

Paul Stapfer, in his work crowned by the Académie Française, concludes that Shakespeare "started out from Protestantism to rise far above the two rival fractions of the Christian Church"; and he emphasizes the "glorious fact emerging from a discussion of this sort, the prodigious impersonality of a poet whose works do not enable us to determine with certitude even the faith in which he was born."

IV

SHAKESPEARE AND THE BIBLE

It does not appear very likely, despite its enormous circulation during his lifetime, that Shakespeare had much direct or intimate knowledge of the Bible. That astute critic, Richard Grant White, brings out this fact by a bit of playful irony. Quoting Hamlet's wish "that the Everlasting had not fixed his canon 'gainst self-slaughter," and Imogen's assertion that "against self-slaughter there is a prohibition so divine," White says:—

> Shakespeare may have known the Bible, as he knew all other things in his day knowable, so much better than I do, that I may not without presumption question what he says with regard to it. But I have not been able to discover any such specific prohibition.

Of course, the King James version was not yet in existence when Shakespeare wrote, but there is little to show that he was immediately or profoundly familiar with the versions of Tindale or Coverdale, the Geneva Bible or the Bishops' Bible, of which the saints had their choice. His scriptural lore was mostly derived from sources no more sacred than the popular ballads which told about Jephthah's daughter and the Waters of Babylon, or from the mysteries, miracles, and moralities oft on view, where he had heard ranting players "outherod Herod" and seen lost souls in Hell's-mouth roasted black like the flea

on Bardolph's red nose. Those mystery and miracle plays were not precisely calculated to promote piety; and the knowledge that it took "two yards and a half of buckram for the Holy Ghost's coat," at a cost of 2s. 1d., would hardly fill a humourist with spiritual power.

But the Bible was in the air of that age—160 editions of the Genevan version appeared from Shakespeare's day to Milton's—and so Shakespeare absorbed much scriptural diction. The rising tide of Puritanism brought much flotsam of text and cant into the language; it was the slang of the times, which Shakespeare picked up and used in picturesque fashion. Often these bits are startling enough to us, because nowadays the phraseology of the Bible is obsolete or obsolescent—our age has too many books to produce many men of one Book. It was different then—the Bible was the best-seller, the staple of discourse, the book for which many men were suffering death and torture. Even if Shakespeare did not read it, he could not escape it. So we find, scattered through his plays, many passages, "old odd ends of holy writ," scores of them, indicating that he was familiar with the phraseology of Scripture. "Rude am I in my speech," says Othello; and "though I be rude in speech," writes Paul to the Corinthians. "Woe to the land that's governed by a child," says Banquo; and "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child!" cries Ecclesiastes. Hamlet's speech, "What a piece of work is man!" smacks a little—very little—of the Eighth Psalm. To deny that Shakespeare knew the Bible would be to call him blind and deaf, but to contend that he was deeply

immersed in it or mightily moved by it would seem fatuous foolery.

Slight similarities in verbiage are used by writers like Bishop Wordsworth, Charles Alfred Swinburne, Doctor Carter, and William Burgess to connect Shakespearean phrases with Scripture or Liturgy. Take such a passage as this, from "Henry VI," Part Three:—

> My brother's blood the thirsty earth hath drunk.

Malone tells us it is taken from Genesis iv, 11. Then Knight tells us that Genesis iv, 11 is the source of these lines from "Henry IV," Part One:—

> No more the thirsty Erinnys of this soil
> Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood.

To resolve the confusion, we turn to this prolific passage in Genesis, and read it, as follows:—

> And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand.

Whereupon we conclude that this sort of reasoning would find analogies to derive Shylock's "wilderness of monkeys" from Isaiah's "garden of cucumbers." Falstaff's "green fields" have actually been connected with the Twenty-third Psalm!

How far-fetched most of the supposed Biblical allusions in Shakespeare's plays really are may be seen from a passage in "All's Well that Ends Well," where Helena says:—

> So Holy Writ in babes hath judgment shown,
> When judges have been babes; great floods have flown
> From simple sources; and great seas have dried
> When miracles have by the greatest been denied.

In this, one commentator has discovered references to Matthew xi, 25, 1 Corinthians i, 27, and Daniel i, 17–20. Any ordinary mortal who looks up the passages will not find any apparent connection. It would be just as easy to interpret "Mary had a little lamb" as a Messianic Psalm.

No Biblical subject appears ever to have attracted Shakespeare, although contemporary dramas by other dramatists brought forward David, Samson, Joshua, Holofernes, Esther, Nebuchadnezzar, Judas, John the Baptist, even Abram and Lot.

Yet a dull and worthy bishop, writing in 1864, let his holy zeal carry him away to the sweeping declaration: "Take the entire range of English literature; put together our best authors, who have written upon subjects not professedly religious or theological, and we shall not find, I believe, in them *all united*, so much evidence of the Bible having been read and used as we have found in Shakespeare *alone*." Bishop Charles Wordsworth would make a splendid Baconian, since he clearly belongs to the school of reasoners who take allegation for proof, assumption for argument, and a circle for a syllogism. Such a statement is enough to make the judicious laugh; and Shakespeare himself, toning down Macduff out of deference to the cloth, might cry: "Did you say all? Oh, Bishop! All?" The Bishop, moreover, missed a good point when he failed to emphasize Shakespeare's critical familiarity with the contradictions of the Bible, evinced when Richard II, out of patience with religion, proceeds to "set the word itself against the word."

It is only necessary to read a page of Shakespeare, and then a page of Milton or Coleridge, of Matthew

Arnold or Robert Browning, or of our good Bishop's illustrious uncle, to realize the utter absurdity of his all-inclusive claim. "The Cotter's Saturday Night" would suffice to show Burns more pious and better versed in the Book than he who refers to Bajazet's mule, when he means Balaam's, and lets a learned Jew laud Daniel as the embodiment of wise judgment, instead of Solomon.

Yet the Rev. Charles Bullock quotes with approval another mighty hunter of parallels who believed "Shakespeare must have been intended for the ministry of the Church." And the Rev. J. G. Hall uses Shakespeare to answer Ingersoll. If the Bard's imagined intimacy with the Bible were established, would that establish anything more than that "the devil can quote Scripture for his purpose"? Colonel Ingersoll and Thomas Paine were better read in the Bible than many theologians. And Marlowe, an avowed Atheist, has more pious speeches and religious references than Shakespeare.

What is true with regard to Shakespeare and the Bible holds good also of that other religious classic, the Book of Common Prayer, despite the three autographs in the Shropshire copy. In "Timon of Athens" are seemingly some reminiscences of this book, which is not at all strange, as the poet, in his youth, must have heard these orisons read many times at church and at school. In "Henry VI" the dying Salisbury cries: "Lord, have mercy on us, wretched sinners!"; but this might be the cry of any dying man, and is not necessarily a quotation.

V

SONNETS, EPITAPH, AND WILL

In the Sonnets, we have been assured by many adept architects of airy romance, the Bard revealed himself. They are commended to us as Shakespeare's confessional, the mirror of his soul, the true measure of the man. If we admit this, though Sidney Lee denies it, and then sift the Sonnets for any expression of religious sentiment, we find practically nothing. Such a phrase as "That God forbid, that made me first your slave," if it is to be taken seriously and literally, would imply pagan polytheism, for it connotes the existence of other deities besides *that* god, and imputes to him erotic interests which rather belong to the Greek pantheon.

A reference to "Eve's apple" does not furnish any proof of scriptural knowledge, since Genesis affords no hint as to the pomological variety of the forbidden fruit. Time and the Muse are apostrophized and personified again and again in the Sonnets, but not one verse, except an allusion to "deaf Heaven," indicates that the writer ever thought of calling upon God. Despite Armitage Brown's autobiographical theory, which discovers a complete confession of faith in Sonnet CXLVI, beginning

> Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,

the average reader of that somewhat opaque sonnet

will hardly find any clear proof of religious conviction. George Herbert Palmer, lecturing at Harvard in a course specially concerned with life after death, found even in this sonnet no more than "Intimations of Immortality."

The assertion, in Sonnet CLI, that "Conscience is born of love," plays havoc with orthodox ethics and ignores Sinai's thunder. What is this brilliant flash of intuition but a poetic paraphrase of Darwin's proposition: "Any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, the parental and filial affections being here included, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well, or nearly as well, developed as in man"?

It would be no difficult matter to prove, from the Sonnets, that Shakespeare was lame, but very hard to prove that he went to prayer-meeting. We read of death's "eternal cold" and "dateless night," but nothing to assure us that the poet had any conception of immortality apart from that conferred by his "eternal lines" and "powerful rhyme." We find echoes of Horace, but no reverberations of the Psalms. Yet General Hitchcock discovered the Trinity, the Logos, and a complete system of theology in these love lyrics, like those ingenious scholastics who found the Bride of Christ, the Holy Church, in the rather unsanctified Song of Solomon.

An interesting subject of speculation is furnished by another bit of poetry, somewhat less elevated than the Sonnets—Shakespeare's epitaph on the monument at Stratford, the well-known quatrain on the stone above the grave:—

Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here:
Blest be the man that spares these stones,
And curst be he that moves my bones.

It may be set down as a self-evident fact that people do not usually write their own epitaphs. If William Shakespeare wrote this poor doggerel, he has very little reason to be proud of it. Francis Bacon could not have done any worse. It is in the conventional strain of the mortuary muse. It has feet, but no wings. It is both illogical and malevolent. But suppose the poet had written it with the trembling hand that traced the signatures on his will, does it show any evidence of faith in a resurrection? It rather shows the contrary. Far from being a confession of Christian faith, this uninspired anathema is probably the superstitious lucubration of some relict relative; or it may be the effusion of rector, vicar, curate, or sexton; or it may be a stock stanza from the store of the stone-cutter. It is about as poetic as the mortuary muse in the funeral notices of our rural press: the clerk who receives the advertisement from the undertaker has an assortment of such elegiac doggerel, which for a small extra fee is appended to the item. That Shakespeare's epitaph is by Shakespeare is just as unlikely as that

Dearest father, thou hast left us—

or "mother," "brother," "sister," "daughter," "uncle," as the case may be, could have been written by the unfortunate deceased.

Hardly more significance attaches to Shakespeare's last will and testament, which starts off with the declaration: "First, I commend my soul into the

hands of God my Creator, hoping and assuredly believing, through the only merits of Jesus Christ my Saviour, to be made partaker of life everlasting, and my body to the earth whereof it is made."

Sidney Lee disposes of this confession of faith rather summarily. "The religious exordium," he writes in his standard Life of Shakespeare, "is in conventional phraseology, and gives no clue to Shakespeare's personal religious opinions. What those opinions were we have neither the means nor the warrant for discussing."

The will, however, contains negative testimony rather definite as to Shakespeare's attitude towards the Church. While he remembers his actor friends with gifts, not a penny is bequeathed to any ecclesiastical purpose or person, although he left ten pounds to the poor of Stratford. There is a tradition that he paid for the tolling of the church-bell in London when his brother Edmund died there; but he seems to have had no concern about any special observance or ceremonial when it came his own turn to shuffle off this mortal coil. Perhaps he was of Hamlet's mind, "The rest is silence."

These words lead to a fertile field of conjecture. In the First Quarto, published in 1603, Hamlet's dying utterance is, "Heaven receive my soul!" In the Second Quarto, published in 1604, Shakespeare has changed this to the significant sentiment just quoted, "The rest is silence!" What does this mean if not that the conventional and stereotyped phrase of the earlier version was altered because the poet thought it unworthy of his princely philosopher? What had happened to give Shakespeare this idea? Had he

been impressed by Florio's translation of Montaigne's Essays, which appeared in 1603 and was one of his favourite books? Some one has even suggested that it was Shakespeare's intention to portray Montaigne in Hamlet. Philarète Chasles, one of the acutest of French critics, describes Shakespeare as "a sceptic, brother of Montaigne, a calm and often cruel looker-on."

Mr. John M. Robertson, in his scholarly volume on "Montaigne and Shakespeare," holds that we are "entitled to infer.....if not that Shakespeare rejected the Christian theory of things, at least that it formed no part of his habitual thinking." Mr. Robertson declares further that, "whether we suppose Shakespeare to have been already led, as he might be by the initiative of his colleague Marlowe, an avowed Atheist, to agnostic views on immortality, or whether we suppose him to have had his first serious lead to such thoughts from Montaigne, we find him to all appearance carrying further the initial impetus, and proceeding from the serene semi-stoicism of the essayist to a deeper and sterner conception of things." Mr. Robertson's conclusions may perhaps be tinctured by his own Rationalistic views. No man can altogether escape from himself. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, found a vein of piety even in the Iliad.

But there is definite testimony to Shakespeare's lack of religion, being testimony given in a striking manner by some member of his own family. His son-in-law, Dr. John Hall, who married Susanna Shakespeare, was a fierce Protestant but a good physician, of whom it is recorded that "such as

hated him for his religion often made use of him." Dr. Hall was a man after God's own heart, unlike Shakespeare's other son-in-law, Judith's husband, who was once fined for swearing. The tradition of Dr. Hall's piety is thus summarized by Halliwell-Phillipps in his "Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare":—

> It is clear, indeed, that, after the death of Shakespeare, whatever may have been the case previously, he openly exhibited strong religious tendencies in the direction of Puritanism, and these may have led to an indifference for the fate of any dramatic manuscripts that might have come into his hands.

This pious son-in-law of the Bard's died in 1635, and his widow, Susanna Shakespeare, not until 1649. Upon Susanna's tombstone some one, evidently familiar with the family and probably a member of it, placed this inscription:—

> Witty above her sex, but that's not all,
> Wise to salvation was good Mistress Hall:
> Something of Shakespeare was in that, but this
> Wholly of him with whom she's now in bliss.

Here is family testimony, quite plain, that Shakespeare was not "wise to salvation," with a subtle intimation that therefore he is not "now in bliss."

VI

PREACHERS AND IDEAL MEN

Holmes, in his "Poet at the Breakfast Table," paints a whimsical picture of Shakespeare at work on "Hamlet" and perpetually interrupted by Mistress Anne, who wishes to know whether to make puddings or flapjack, until he rises in despair with the words: "Oh! oh! these women! I'll e'en step over to the parson's and have a cup of sack with his reverence, for methinks Master Hamlet hath forgot that which was just now on his tongue to speak!" It is far more likely that Shakespeare went to the Falcon Tavern, which was just across the street, to play at shovelboard with the apocryphal landlord, Julius Shaw. And in all probability the one place where he never went was the parsonage. The few parsons he has put into his plays, like Sir Oliver Martext and Sir Hugh Evans, would lead us to surmise that he loved the genus no more than did the creator of Mr. Chadband and of Melchisedech Howler. Suspicion may not be wide astray when it scents a certain frigidity and tension between New Place and the Stratford Manse. Perhaps it was on account of that pigsty which the Rev. John Rogers, vicar at Stratford, wished to erect in 1613, but which the wrathful opposition of his neighbours caused to be forbidden.

The legend that Shakespeare died a Catholic might have arisen as a result of the poet's declining to seek,

in his last days, the ministrations of the vicar at Stratford. We have only one record of a preacher's being entertained at New Place, and that happened while the master of the house was off in London. Whether the Halls invited this itinerant parson while Shakespeare was away, or whether Shakespeare went away while the holy man was in the house, it is vain to conjecture; Brandes notes the fact. Clergymen do not appear to be in high favour with Shakespeare. Rosalind, in "As You Like It," takes a fling at long sermons; and "Would I were the first that ever dissembled in such a gown," says the Clown in "Twelfth Night," masquerading as Sir Topas. If Shakespeare died without the assistance of an Anglican cleric, it seems even more certain that he called for no Roman priest; so the legend, vague and tenuous, may have arisen from his scepticism, or more likely from his antipathy to a Puritan fanatic who damned all stage-plays and those concerned therewith. Heresy and revolt were nothing novel in the Shakespeare family: the poet's uncle Harry was excommunicated in 1581 for defiance of an ecclesiastical court, and two years later was fined for refusing to wear a cap on Sundays and holidays, as prescribed.

Just as we can find nothing in the family traditions to indicate that Shakespeare had any religious tendencies or professed any definite creed, so we can find nothing positive in the works, though much that inclines to the negative. "Had he been imbued with any special religious faith," says Elze, "he could not have avoided referring to his sentiments, though he need not exactly have expressed them openly, and unconsciously he would also have applied them as

his standard." That, it appears, is exactly what Shakespeare did; but the results of inquiry and analysis are not encouraging to the religious claimants.

With due allowance for the dramatist's impersonality, perhaps the surest guide-posts to the poet's philosophy of life may be found in the often-repeated sentiments of his ideal characters. Hamlet's dying gasp, "The rest is silence," might serve as the epitaph of an Agnostic. The famous soliloquy is the cry of a doubter who even doubts his doubt, for after a recent interview and séance with his father's spirit the Prince yet appears to be sceptical as to a future state. The wise and noble Prospero, too, declares that "our little life is rounded with a sleep."

A bird of another feather, the rare rogue Autolycus, vows that "for the life to come, I sleep out the thought of it." And to delicious Jack Falstaff even hell fire is a matter for mirth, a text for perpetual jests and gibes.

"Measure for Measure," which play the Spanish inquisitor tore out entire, is worst of all in this respect. "There are passages of infidelity in this play that staggered Warburton, made Johnson indignant, and confounded Coleridge and Knight," writes W. J. Birch, who produced five hundred and fifty pages on "The Philosophy and Religion of Shakespeare" to prove Warburton and Johnson right. When the Duke of Vienna, disguised as a friar, ministers consolation to Claudio, imprisoned and condemned to death, his long utterance contains not a shred of an allusion or appeal to religious sentiment; it is all pagan stoicism, almost cynical. And

the tenderest funeral dirge ever written, in "Cymbeline," that exquisite "Song" at the burial of Fidele, the last poetry Tennyson tried to read in the last hours of his life, that loveliest of all elegies, has hardly a vague hint of heaven and no syllable of the soul:—

> Fear no more the heat o' th' sun,
> Nor the furious winter's rages;
> Thou thy worldly task hast done,
> Home art gone and ta'en thy wages.
> Golden lads and girls all must
> As chimney-sweepers come to dust.

William Collins, who would read nothing but the Bible, and finally, as became the son of a hatter, went mad, took it upon himself to substitute another song for this dirge, which Warburton also thought had a Lucianic ring. Just as Schiller, in his translation of "Macbeth," makes the Porter a godly and sober Lutheran who sings a pious morning hymn.

Richard is a pre-incarnation of Nietzsche's Superman, and Timon, in Swinburne's phrase, "an atheistic Stylites." In the story of the Athenian misanthrope, indeed, there is so little of dramatic action that it is hard to understand what tempted Shakespeare to its treatment unless it was the glamour of such a philosophy in some dark mood of negation and revolt against a world full of lickspittles and hypocrites.

"Measure for Measure," also, is well-nigh as fierce a castigation of snivelling hypocrisy as Molière's "Tartuffe." In this Rembrandtesque comedy we find that bitter sneer at the "sanctimonious pirate," who set out to sea with the Ten Commandments, but scraped one out of the table, "Thou shalt not steal," which interfered with his business.

The historian Hallam thought "Measure for Measure" was the measure of Shakespeare's own soul. Yet in this play there are things that "pained" Coleridge and caused Knight to "hurry past." But the acute listener hears subtle heresies in all the plays. In Lorenzo's poetic love-making by moonlight are faint echoes of Plato and Campanella, a monistic vision of the universality of sentient life. Even in a scene seemingly so innocent as that in which Sir Toby Belch eggs Sir Andrew Aguecheek to write a letter of defiance to the disguised Viola, the impious benchers of the Temple, for whom "Twelfth Night" was written, could discern a satire on Sir Edward Coke's speech accusing Raleigh of Atheism. "I *thou* thee, thou traitor," shouted Coke at the accused; "if thou *thou'st* him some thrice, it shall not be amiss," advises Sir Toby, in what may be a later interpolation. Raleigh was Shakespeare's friend, so he was following the bent of his inclination while providing amusement for the law students, and also satirizing an enemy of all players.

VII

HATRED OF HYPOCRISY

In the "Merchant of Venice" occurs one passage significant because of its passionate bitterness of accusation:—

> In religion
> What damnèd error, but some sober brow
> Will bless it and approve it with a text.

This play throughout, indeed, reads like a satire upon Christian intolerance and duplicity. That most scholarly of American actors, Richard Mansfield, like Heinrich Heine, used to contend plausibly that the only respectable character in the play was the Jew. In the Trial Scene there is much talk of mercy as a Christian virtue, but the Jew is expected to show it, and little is shown to him when they have him on the hip. They stole his daughter and his ducats; they mock his misery and insult his religion; scoffs, jibes, taunts, and threats are hurled at him. As we look upon much-lauded Antonio, and weigh his treatment of Shylock—

> You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,
> And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine—

we must all rejoice that this type of Christian gentleman has become scarce in our day, though far from extinct. Jews who object to the "Merchant of Venice" are on the wrong track; it is the Christians who show far blacker than poor Shylock.

The members of Shakespeare's dramatic family have no very high opinion of Christians as such, judging by their comments. Launce, in the "Two Gentlemen of Verona," compares a Christian with a water-spaniel, giving preference to the dog, and again makes it the test of a Christian whether he will go along to the ale-house. Jack Cade seems to think ignorance of nouns and verbs and such abominable words should be a sign of faith. Shylock taunts his persecutors with being slave-drivers.

Go through all the great plays, and we will not find one true and noble man, one sweet and virtuous woman, who is such to please God, nor one villain who appears to have the slightest fear of divine wrath and retribution. All seem to think of Providence as neutral and somewhat remote, an anæmic and academic abstraction; of Heaven as an "undiscovered country," somewhere beyond the "still-vext Bermoothes," far off as the "coast of Bohemia," and labyrinthine as the "augmentation of the Indies." No one thinks of praying, ordinarily, except in official invocations before battles; and in Lear's sublime supplication he does not address God, but voices a very communistic condolence to the proletariat, with a codicil of warning to the aristocracy.

The only one of Shakespeare's heroes who makes proud ostentation of his faith is Henry V, who is quite as sure of divine collaboration as any kaiser. There is a superstition among the commentators that Henry V is Shakespeare's favourite hero, and it may be so. But Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, in his "Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship," has made it plain that Falstaff had to die if Henry was to play the hero,

because, as Hazlitt said, "he is the better man of the two." And those who knew him best realized this fullest. Bardolph wishes he were with Falstaff, "either in Heaven or Hell," just as Shelley would "rather be damned with Plato and Bacon than go to Heaven with Paley and Malthus." Walter Bagehot, reasoning along this line, suspects and fears that Shakespeare "had an objection to grim people, and would have liked the society of Mercutio better than that of a dreary divine."

Little edification will be found from the religious characters in the plays. Shakespeare seems to have thought that the signs of religion were moping melancholy, sighing and singing psalms, upturned eyes and madness. In the chronicle plays the religious characters are weak, vacillating, treacherous, cruel, hypocritical, profane, and contemptible in every way by turns: see Henry VI, swooning and puling prayers while his best and noblest friend is strangled in bed; see Richard II slip from grovelling faith to spiteful infidelity as his God leaves him in the lurch; even Wolsey, speaking of Doctor Pace's death, calls him "a fool, for he would needs be virtuous"; the two bishops, Canterbury and Ely, in "Henry V," plot to throw the world into warlike confusion in order to prevent reforms in the Church which would take some of their revenues for almshouses. Birch truly says that "Shakespeare assigns religion not only to the weakest, but the wickedest of his characters. They sometimes use it as a cover to their unbelief, and often in all sincerity join in it their iniquities."

If the hypocrisy of such a character as Gloucester seems overdrawn, it is only necessary to read the

historic account of Oliver Cromwell's antics over the "Humble Petition and Advice" to assume the royal title and power. Cromwell's attitude throughout, when the committees call upon him, was the same as Richard's, and he finally refused the kingship only because the army, like the Fifth Monarchy Men, was against it.

Richard, a gore-spattered Uriah Heep, cries: "I thank my God for my humility!" Another hard-fighting man, "banished Norfolk" in "Richard II," receives a glowing endorsement of his orthodoxy from the Bishop of Carlisle. It looks almost as if Shakespeare had regarded Christianity as a peculiarly martial and militant religion, indispensable to a complete king and an efficient soldier; as if his theology comprehended only a "God of battles," and a celestial Blackstone who recognized in monarchy his terrestrial ideal.

VIII

NO NEED FOR PROVIDENCE

Although Young, author of the "Night Thoughts," assures us that "Shakespeare but wrote the play th' Almighty made," we do not find the intervention of supernatural powers any essential part of Shakespeare's technique. The *deus ex machina* was to him an unimportant supernumerary. He might have spoken like Laplace, who explained his nebular hypothesis to Napoleon, and was asked where he had left God. "Sire, I have no need of that hypothesis," answered Laplace. Even the providence of Brutus, one of Shakespeare's noblest men, is nearly as shadowy and rarified as Matthew Arnold's "Power not ourselves."

> Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie
> Which we ascribe to Heaven,

cries practical Helena, in "All's Well that Ends Well"; while in "King Lear" one of Shakespeare's noblemen, Gloucester, says even more impiously:—

> As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;
> They kill us for their sport.

Though Hamlet, in a reverent mood, asserts—

> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will,

cynical critics have not been lacking who would punctuate these lines differently:—

> There's a divinity that shapes our ends
> Rough, hew them how we will.

A Latin quotation garbled from Seneca is used in "Titus Andronicus" to question the justice of Deity. The malice or impotence of Heaven is a frequent topic of comment and spring of action. "The gods seal our eyes, and laugh at us while we strut to our confusion," is Antony's version. Coriolanus, too, sees the gods looking down to laugh at the unnatural scene of his family's supplication. But these are heathens, suckled in a creed outworn. Yet Juliet's agony sees "no pity sitting in the clouds." In "Henry VI" we witness a trial at arms in which the false accuser triumphs over the innocent and pious accused, while his hypocrisy causes the doltish king to applaud him. When Macduff hears of his children's slaughter, he cries out:—

> Did Heaven look on,
> And would not take their part?

If there is any one character in the plays that stands for Shakespeare himself, it is the mirthful melancholy Jaques of "As You Like It." John Malone, a sterling old Shakespearean actor of the last generation, used to contend that Shakespeare wrote this part for himself and played it, though tradition traced back to Shakespeare's own brother has it that in this play he took old Adam. It is certain that Jaques does not figure in Lodge's romance, "Rosalynde," from which Shakespeare drew the plot of his comedy, nor does Touchstone. So there may be something in George Brandes's belief that Jaques is Shakespeare himself; and the philosophy of Jaques, an embryo Hamlet, from this derives a special significance. "I am ambitious for a motley coat," he cries; and in the Sonnets Shakespeare confesses, "I made myself a motley to the

view." While Jaques is ready to "rail against all the first-born of Egypt," while he declares something to be "plain as way to parish church," and while he counsels the rustic lovers to be married by "a good priest," he gives no intimation of having heeded any but "sermons in stones"; in his apologue that "all the world's a stage" he omits any allusion to Dramatist or Stage Manager; and though at the end he goes to join a religious convertite, it is to learn something. If Shakespeare in Jaques depicted himself, he was more sage than saint, rather pagan than Puritan.

With the stench of the *auto da fé* in his nostrils, with Servetus burned at Geneva and Bruno burned at Rome, with Peter Cole and Francis Kett just burned in England for tame heresies, Shakespeare was not likely to grow too bold. He made some of his sharpest thrusts with the tongues of allowed fools and madmen. He was after a coat-of-arms, not a martyr's crown. Voltaire took the sacrament and made a confession of faith to assure himself decent burial; is it not likely that Shakespeare, to avoid persecution and live in comfort, conformed to some observances and guarded his words, when fines were imposed for absence from church, and the gallows awaited the loud dissenter? "Paris is well worth a mass," cried Henri quatre—or was it Sully? Shakespeare had no intention of going "to hell for an eternal moment or so," merely to clinch an argument, though he says in "As You Like It," pleading for free thought and free speech:—

> Give me leave
> To speak my mind, and I will through and through
> Cleanse the foul body of the infected world.

"His task," says Romain Rolland, writing of "Shakespeare the Truth-Teller," "was just as difficult as that of modern writers, even more so; for he was exposed to the dangers of a capricious and tyrannical authority, several of them even, one encroaching upon the other: royalty, great lords, churches, a brutal populace. In one of his Sonnets (LXVI) he expresses his disgust with a life where all free forces, all truthful art, are bound and gagged." Feeling himself to be thus "tongue-tied by authority," Shakespeare had to tell us many truths through the mouths of his "allowed fools," and many more through his own eloquent silence.

No one has paid richer tribute to Shakespeare than Prof. George Santayana, who recognizes in the poet's works "the truest portrait and best memorial of man," which he would transport to some other planet to tell the inhabitants what we were like. But he fears that "the archæologists of that future age, or the cosmographers of that other part of the heavens, after conscientious study of our Shakespearean autobiography, would misconceive our life in one important respect. They would hardly understand that man had had a religion."

There are various traces of Shakespeare's acquaintance with Lucretius, Lucian, Moschus, Catullus, and Seneca; the book Hamlet is reading in the act before he utters his soliloquy has been identified as a treatise by Cardano, who was accused of atheism, and spent nine years in a dungeon at Bologna. Where there is no contact, there is an affinity; Falstaff foreshadows the Hobbesian doctrine "Of Liberty and Necessity"; and when Dogberry exclaims that "God's a good

man," one wonders if he has not read the flippant rubai of Omar Fitz-Gerald :—

> " Why," said another, " some there are who tell
> Of one who threatens he will toss to Hell
> The luckless Pots he marred in making—Pish !
> He's a Good Fellow, and 'twill all be well."

IX

JESTS AT HEAVEN AND HELL

Shakespeare, surely, was no saint, though we need not regard him either as the abandoned losel depicted by Taine or the sensualist imagined by Frank Harris. Nor was he a Puritan, "singing psalms to hornpipes," as we may judge from his sly sneers at that sect, which was doing its worst to make life less worth living—to increase the attractiveness of the other world by diminishing the compensations of this. Even the Hobby-horse of the May Morris had been driven out as an abomination, a Popish device of the Devil, so that both Moth and Hamlet could sing that it was forgot. The Puritans hated laughter and joy, "cakes and ale," and Shakespeare may have personified the malignant crew in his Malvolio, to the delight of the Elizabethan playgoer. "Sometimes he is a kind of Puritan," says Maria of Malvolio. "If I thought that, I'd beat him like a dog," declares Sir Andrew—a line that would get a laugh from the groundlings, but was not written by one who respected the Puritans. Sir Andrew's reference to another sect, whom he links contemptuously with politicians, shows that, like the amiable old turncoat Howell, he "could be content to see an Anabaptist go to Hell on a Brownist's back." Again, Aguecheek wails: "Methinks sometimes I have no more wit than a Christian"—which cannot be construed as a compliment for true believers. And

then comes the Clown to ridicule Christian inconsistency in general :—

CLOWN : Good madonna! why mournest thou?
OLIVIA : Good fool, for my brother's death.
CLOWN : I think his soul is in Hell, madonna.
OLIVIA : I know his soul is in Heaven, fool.
CLOWN : The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul, being in Heaven. Take away the fool, gentlemen!

Strange to say, the only members of Shakespeare's dramatic family that appear to have any intimations, expectations, or apparent realization of a hereafter are pagans. Cleopatra has "immortal longings," perhaps the ennui of burnt-out passion, just as Becky Sharp became religious after having exhausted all the thrills of roguery. Antony raves of a place "where souls do couch on flowers," which would describe Mahomet's Paradise. The "winged sprite" of Lucrece ascends "unto the clouds," in utter disregard of Roman mythology. Among the Christians, poor old Le Beau, in "As You Like It," maunders of "a better world than this," but no commentator seems to know what Le Beau is talking about, the allusion to a future life being doubtful.

Schlegel, who was devout, found fault with Hamlet's scepticism; but Friar Laurence, consoling the parents of Romeo and Juliet, dwells just as little upon religious promises, and does not even suggest a mass for their repose. When Brutus hears of Portia's death, "We must die" is the sole comfort in his thoughts; and when he parts from Cassius his foreboding words are :—

For whether we shall meet again, I know not;
Therefore our everlasting farewell take.

North's Plutarch was Shakespeare's source for "Julius Cæsar," and it is significant that in North's translation, though not in Clough's, Brutus declares that he "shall live in another more glorious world." Why did Shakespeare suppress this certain hope? Shakespeare also suppressed a passage in Queen Katherine's historic letter to Henry VIII which contains references to his soul's health and the hope of seeing him hereafter. Why did Shakespeare eliminate such phrases if he held any such faith himself, or deemed it worthy of heroic minds?

For Shakespeare, indeed, the life to come is usually a matter of mirth and jest. He was always sending people to Heaven or to Hell upon all sorts of errands. Macbeth's Porter pokes fun at the "everlasting bonfire," and complains that the courtyard is "too cold for Hell." Both Hamlet and Richard gleefully ring the changes on the same joke—as when the King asks where is Polonius, and gets for answer:—

> In Heaven, send thither to see; if your messenger find him not there, seek him i' th' other place yourself.

Falstaff is forever harping on Hell—it is suggested by Bardolph's red nose, and he fears the oil in himself would set Hell afire. Then there is Beatrice, talking saucily to the Devil and Saint Peter. We find irreverent references to "suffering salvation" and "being condemned into everlasting redemption"; while Cassio and Iago argue it out on a point of military precedence, whether the lieutenant is to be saved before the ancient.

The idea that death is an "eternal sleep" runs through the plays from first to last. It is voiced both

by Titus and Marcus Andronicus in the tragedy of horrors which is commonly supposed to represent Shakespeare's earliest work. It is echoed by Prospero in the fantasy which is generally thought to be his last work. The wise Duke in "Measure for Measure" says :—

> The best of rest is sleep,
> And that thou oft provokest; yet grossly fear'st
> Thy death, which is no more.

These words are spoken in the character of the monk as consolation to the condemned Claudio, who later puts forth the same doubt as Hamlet—"to die, and go we know not where," adding a fling at the inventors of hell fire—

> or to be
> Of those that lawless and incertain thoughts
> Imagine howling;

which implies that he had no high opinion either of the Calvinistic or the Catholic theologues, with their "lawless and incertain" imaginations of eternal punishment. This place of "howling" evidently is the same to which Laertes ordains the "churlish priest," but it held no terrors either for Shakespeare's heroes or his villains. When Lear says that Cordelia will "come no more," he affirms it with five cumulative "Nevers!" The dying words of Othello have no gleam of hope nor faith in Heaven. The dying words of Richard and of John have no fear of judgment nor terror of Hell. "You'll never return to tell me," the philosophic Gaoler in "Cymbeline" assures Posthumus, who is doomed to die.

X

WAS SHAKESPEARE A SPIRITUALIST?

If Shakespeare's dramatic technique leans towards any hypothesis of a future life, it is towards that of Spiritualism rather than that of Christianity. He shows us a fine assortment of ghosts, rather more rational and efficient than those of the modern séance room, but unmistakably akin to its phenomena. It is easy, with a little zeal and ingenuity, to prove that Shakespeare was anything from a Seventh-Day Adventist to a Zoroastrian. Let us assume that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle were asked what was Shakespeare's opinion on Ectoplasm. Now let us follow the mental processes by which Sir Arthur would probably arrive at the conclusion that Shakespeare was a Spiritualist. It could plausibly be argued that when he wrote the tragedy of "Hamlet" he deliberately plotted the action to indicate that the young Prince was the medium responsible for his father's materialization.

The Ghost, a part played by Shakespeare himself, never appears except when young Hamlet is near at hand. He makes his first appearance on the platform, to Horatio and Marcellus; but Hamlet is not very far, for at the end of this scene Marcellus declares:

> I this morning know
> Where we shall find him most conveniently.

In the next scene we learn that Hamlet has just

returned from school at Wittenberg, leaving the definite impression that the Ghost has begun to walk since the young Prince arrived at court. When Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo, a little later, come to tell Hamlet what they have seen, before they have uttered a word, Hamlet has a line no commentator has ever explained satisfactorily. He cries out:

My father!—Methinks I see my father!

The meaning of this becomes perfectly clear if Hamlet had seen the apparition; otherwise the line is arrant nonsense. Observing that he has startled them, and that they are about to quiz him, Hamlet attempts to throw his friends off the scent with the flimsy evasion, "In my mind's eye, Horatio!" During the remainder of that scene he is endeavouring to extract information from them; but the questions he asks indicate he knows just about as much as they know, if not more.

The Ghost has not yet spoken to Hamlet, as it does in the scene following. Here, before the Ghost appears, there are several references to trumpets heard in the King's wassail. When the Ghost finally appears, a line uttered by Hamlet may be construed to mean that the apparition carries a trumpet:—

Bring with thee airs from Heaven or blasts from Hell.

Usually this is taken to refer to winds, but it is far more definite if it means musical sounds such as might be produced upon a trumpet. The entire scene between Hamlet and the Ghost has many characteristics of a trumpet séance—it is a remote part of the platform, wrapt in darkness, and the voice evidently is more or less indistinct, to judge from the repeated injunctions

to listen carefully and Hamlet's repeated assurances that he has heard.

Most striking of all is the scene in the Queen's closet, where the Ghost appears for the last time. This room is enclosed with curtains, like the cabinet of a modern medium. The scene is at night, as is shown by Hamlet's bidding his mother good-night at the close. And the entire demeanour of Hamlet, as described by the Queen, is that of a trance medium :—

> You do bend your eye on vacancy,
> And with the incorporal air do hold discourse.
> Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep,
> And, as the sleeping soldiers in the alarm,
> Your bedded hair, like life in excrements,
> Start up and stand on end.

Hamlet had demeaned himself in the same way on the platform—each "petty artery" in his body, he declares, is "hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve." Which recalls the muscular contractions that accompanied the manifestations of Eusapia Palladino and other mediums, the currents of air that lifted her hair, her glassy look and wild stare.

If Hamlet be regarded as a medium, he was mad to the degree that all mediums are mad. The question of Hamlet's sanity has always been a favourite topic of discussion among Shakespearean students; that he was "queer" all the people about him, including Polonius and Ophelia, were agreed. Joseph Grasset declares that "a good many mediums become insane." As a class they have that peculiar trait of brilliant, eccentric, and disjointed utterance of thought. Again, as a class they are irresolute and wavering, lack execution, and seem never to accomplish any useful

purpose. They are at times melancholy and morbid, again unnaturally and aggressively gay. More often than not they are lovable and weak. All these traits characterize young Hamlet, as portrayed by Shakespeare.

Hamlet's whole appearance and character, as a reading of the play will show, correspond with these mediumistic traits. He is abnormally sensitive, highly strung, introspective, melancholy and merry by turns, irresolute of will, infirm of purpose, quick to accept suggestion. Charles Richet has said that "the generality of mediums, if not all, offer nervous phenomena, and are neuropathic when not merely hysterical."

The most striking testimony to Hamlet's psychic powers is implied in the statement that he had recently returned from Wittenberg. Wittenberg was the Lilly-dale of the Middle Ages. It was at Wittenberg that Faust, the most famous necromancer of the centuries, received his education and worked many of his marvels. It was at Wittenberg, at a college banquet, that he materialized the spirit of Helen of Troy for the delectation of former fellow students. To say that Hamlet had been at Wittenberg was to intimate that he had delved into occult lore and would justify him in saying:—

> There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
> Than are dreamt of in our philosophy.

It may be asked how Shakespeare himself hit upon the idea of investing Hamlet with psychic power. The solution is obvious. During Shakespeare's young manhood there flourished in England the first of

modern mediums—the famous John Dee. In his curious memoirs, John Dee tells how one day in November, 1582, as he was praying, an angel appeared to him and presented him with a highly polished black stone, which produced visions and emitted sounds and enabled him to hold intercourse with departed spirits. Shakespeare was eighteen years old at that time. Doctor Dee was often at the Court of Queen Elizabeth, as was Shakespeare, who may be indebted for his Ariel to Dee.

Perhaps the suggestion of Hamlet's spiritualistic affinities may be traced back to the original source of the saga, to Saxo Grammaticus. Shakespeare's tragedy was founded on the old Danish chronicle, written as early as 1204, though not printed till 1514. In its English translation, by way of Belleforest, it was called "The Hystorie of Hamblet." An episodic passage in the tale, from which the poet may have taken some hints, especially of the hero's melancholy mood, and his apprehension that "the spirit he has seen may be the Devil," runs as follows:—

> In those days the northern parts of the world, living then under Satan's laws, were full of enchanters, so that there was not any young gentleman that knew not something therein. And so Hamblet had been instructed in that devilish art whereby the wicked spirit abuseth mankind. It toucheth not the matter herein to discover the parts of divination in man, and whether this Prince, by reason of his over-great melancholy, had received these impressions, divining that which never any had before declared.

Thomas Nash, one of Shakespeare's contemporary writers, was addicted to occult studies. Nash published his "Terrors of the Night: A Discourse of

Apparitions," in 1594; in the same year he also published his "Life of Jack Wilton," a book telling how Cornelius Agrippa, at the Court of the Elector of Saxony, raised the spirit of Cicero in the presence of the Earl of Surrey. Nash was one of the group of writers who furnished inspiration to Shakespeare; he was the intimate friend of Greene and Peele, who are associated with Shakespeare in writing "Titus Andronicus." Nash and Shakespeare must have known each other in the narrow London of that day, and spirit apparitions were no doubt the common talk of the time, worked up in "Hamlet" with a master's intuition for fine stage effect. "Hamlet" appeared in 1602, within eight years of Nash's books.

"Macbeth" is another tragedy in which Shakespeare may be said to have taken a leaf from the book of modern Spiritualism. Here the medium seemingly is Lady Macbeth, whose sleep-walking scene affords a perfect illustration of the mediumistic trance. Her presence probably caused the etherealization of the dagger before Macbeth's eyes; she could be held responsible for the materialization of Banquo, and possibly for the rappings which precede the entrance of the Porter—by the Bard perhaps purposely blended with the knocking of Macduff and Lennox, in order to supply an alternative rationalistic explanation of the phenomena.

The tent scene in "Julius Cæsar" also contains hints of conformity with séance conditions—the tent serving as the "cabinet," while the low-burning light, the music, and the high nervous tension of the preceding scene supply other requisite elements. The boy Lucius, usually played by a young woman, may

be regarded as the medium, for he sinks into a trance. The Society for Psychical Research might gravely classify the vision beheld by Brutus among warning apparitions under Phantasms of the Dead.

The Duchess of Gloucester, in "Henry VI," consults wizards, who promise to show her

> A spirit raised from depth of under ground
> That shall make answer to such questions
> As by your grace shall be propounded him.

The séance in the garden, however, is more reminiscent of Endor than prescient of modern psychic research.

Undoubtedly Shakespeare, who knew a little of everything, was a bit of a Psychical Researcher himself, and made use of his occult lore in writing "Hamlet," which has been thus interpreted recently in New York by John Barrymore, who went into a trance in the closet scene, and some years earlier by Howell Hansel, another American actor of rare intelligence.

Howell Hansel has died, and so should be able to furnish confirmation of the theory, if there were anything in Spiritualism. Should he not have had opportunities to interview the author himself? The question was actually propounded through a noted American slate-writing medium, Pierre Keeler. The spirit of Howell Hansel was asked:—

> Was our opinion regarding Hamlet correct, and what does Will say about it?

The spirit obligingly wrote a prompt answer, in the following message:—

> Your conceptions regarding Hamlet were about right. I know that.

Unfortunately, the spirit message did not tell what Will says, and still more unfortunately it was a palpable fraud. So the question remains open for discussion among other Shakespearean cruces. But the argument here presented as an elaborate exercise in irony is not a bit more vacuous nor a bit less candid than arguments usually built up to show Shakespeare as the votary of some other sect or cult. The truth is that when Shakespeare needed a ghost he summoned it. They were stage ghosts, and caused Richard Green Moulton, writing of "Shakespeare as a Dramatic Thinker," to complain:—

> If so little is permitted to supernatural agency, was it worth while to introduce it at all? In reality, the function of the supernatural in Shakespeare is most important; but it is a function addressed not to the persons in the story, but to the spectator in the drama.

XI

AGNOSTIC AND RATIONALIST

Whatever may be held of Shakespearean ghosts, Shakespearean death-beds are agnostic. Karl Friedrich Elze notes that

> No poet has introduced so many persons on the point of death as Shakespeare, but of all these it is only the heathens, Antony and Cleopatra, who allude to meeting again after death; and Cleopatra, moreover, in doing so, directly contradicts herself, for shortly before her death she speaks in praise of death as eternal sleep. And even at the death of Queen Katharine (in "Henry VIII"), who dies like a saint with a vision of Heaven opening to receive her, there is no word of a meeting beyond the grave. And nowhere else in Shakespeare is any hopeful or comforting prospect offered of a future life, and in the outbursts of grief over the beloved dead nowhere do we find any of the Christian forms of consolation.

The same considerations had already stirred the wrath of the orthodox Samuel Johnson, who declared that "I cannot, without indignation, find Shakespeare saying that death is only sleep, lengthening out his exhortation by a sentence which in the friar is impious, in the reasoner is foolish, and in the poet trite and vulgar."

Macbeth makes a reference to his "eternal jewel, given to the common enemy of man"; but it does not appear to worry him further. Clarence, in the

Quarto edition of "Richard III," asks his murderers to pity him by "Christ's dear blood, shed for our grievous sins," with the sole result that one of the murderers finds a religious sanction for despatching him—they are executing God's vengeance.

Just as a vein of subtle irony is directed by Shakespeare against the superficial religiosity of the masses, so in a passage from "The Tempest" we find a pregnant reflection upon the great problem of evil and suffering that has perplexed the theologians of all ages. Miranda, after witnessing the shipwreck, tells her father :—

> Had I been any God of power, I would
> Have sunk the sea within the earth, or ere
> It should the good ship so have swallowed, and
> The fraughting souls within her.

This, in its way, is just as heretical and revolutionary as Euripides' denial that the adulterous gods exist; if immoral, they are no gods. Churton Collins, by the way, has traced numerous parallelisms between Shakespeare and Euripides, the Rationalist among the great Greek tragedians, who scattered the seed of atheism through his "Bellerophontes," boldly denying that there was any god in Heaven.

Rationalism is the habitual attitude of Shakespeare's lucid-minded men. When Glendower boasts about the earthquake at his birth, Hotspur says it would have occurred just the same "if your mother's cat had kittened." When Glendower brags,

> I can call spirits from the vasty deep,

Hotspur jeeringly replies :—

> Why, so can I.....but will they come?

In "King Lear" prophecy is ridiculed, just as Hamlet defies augury. Hamlet's "special providence" is a thin verbal veil for fatalism. Signs and portents, demoniac possession, and miracles are ridiculed as superstitions. Nothing could be more effective than the exposure of the Simpcox miracle in "Henry VI"; even the name of the fakir, compounded of "simpleton" and "coxcomb," seems eloquent of contempt for such vulgar fraud.

The predominant philosophic note appears to be that of Materialism. Hamlet's graveyard musings are a poetic paraphrase of Jakob Moleschott's "Kreislauf des Lebens." Matter is eternal. Change follows upon change. In "King Lear" the Lucretian axiom, "Nothing can come of nothing," is pressed home. Timon addresses Nature as the

> Common mother, thou,
> Whose womb unmeasurable, and infinite breast,
> Teems, and feeds all.

And if it be contended that these were pagans, there is the good Friar in "Romeo and Juliet," to proclaim "the earth, that's Nature's mother, is her tomb." This was the philosophy of Shakespeare's Atheistic friend, Marlowe, who let his Edward II swear "by earth, the common mother of us all."

Every writer who has given much study and thought to the subject, without starting out as the advocate of some preconceived opinion, comes to the same conclusion, mildly enough put by Mr. John M. Robertson in his "Short History of Freethought":—

> Above all, there remains the great illustration of the rationalistic spirit of the English literary renascence of the sixteenth century—the drama of Shakespeare.

> Of that it may confidently be said that every attempt to find for it a religious foundation has failed.....His whole treatment of life in the great tragedies and serious comedies is even more definitely untheological than Montaigne's own doctrine.

John Churton Collins, who must be accounted one of the keenest and best-equipped of Shakespearean critics, speaking of Shakespeare and Montaigne, declared that "both are practically theistical Agnostics." This verdict he buttressed with telling quotations in an essay on "Sophocles and Shakespeare":—

> Neither Cordelia nor Desdemona, neither Constance nor Imogen, in their darkest hour express any confidence in the mercy and justice of Heaven. Nay, Imogen distinctly says, turning to Pisanio:
>
> "Thou art all the comfort
> The gods will diet me with."
>
> "Did Heaven look on and would not take their part?" is Macduff's ejaculation when he hears of the slaughter of his wife and children. "Are there no stones in Heaven but what serve for the thunder?" are Othello's words when Iago's villainy is divulged. Othello himself, falling by a fate as terrible as it is undeserved, dies without a syllable of hope. "The rest is silence" are the ominous words with which Hamlet takes leave of life.....It is within the limits of the knowable that Shakespeare's theology confines itself.

What, then, was the basis and sanction of Shakespeare's morality which courses through the plays as their life-blood? It seems to be purely utilitarian. Richard and Macbeth might be lecturers on the evolution of ethics, demonstrating and oft declaring that vice and crime are self-destructive—that conduct has its unescapable Karma—that we might "jump

the life to come," if it were not for the operation of "even-handed justice." In short, what we call morality is the law of Nature, the necessity of survival for the individual and for society. Not in any theological sense, but as the relation of cause to effect, in the life of the individual and in the life of the race, sin is suicide. One of Shakespeare's simple shepherds sets forth the perfect life thus :—

> I am a true labourer; I earn what I eat, get what I wear; owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness; glad of other men's good, content with my harm; and the greatest of my pride is to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck.

What is commonly extolled as the Christian life receives scant courtesy on the lips of Shakespeare's scoffers and mockers. "What's a joint of mutton or two in a whole Lent?" asks the Hostess in "Henry IV." Falstaff wishes he were a weaver—he "could sing psalms or anything"; while he "would not endanger his soul gratis," he sold it "to the devil on Good Friday for a cup of Madeira and a cold capon's leg." Slender vows he'll "never be drunk again but in godly company.....with those who have the fear of God." Gratiano promises to "swear but now and then, wear prayer-books in his pockets," and otherwise play melancholy hypocrite.

Georg Gottfried Gervinus, most esteemed among the German critics, sums up Shakespeare's whole religious attitude thus :—

> That Shakespeare thought freely and clearly upon religious things an attentive reader can never doubt from his writings; it is a quality which raises him far above the narrow-mindedness in religious matters so peculiar to many of his countrymen in the present

> day. He was a man of much too clear a mind, even in an age which had not outgrown crude superstition, to do homage even to the more refined. Prophecies come under the law of nature, and miracles are seen from the viewpoint of reason, even on the lips of his priests. He trifles so wantonly with Hell and the devil that it offends even the divines of to-day, who regard Launcelot's hit at Christian propaganda and the sacrilegious allusions to Scripture as striking proof of Shakespeare's heathenism. It is peculiar that precisely his Friar Laurence administers the sweet milk of philosophy, and not that of religion, just as his anchorites are all practical and worldly people. It may strike us that his pious Richard and Henry VI are very weak people and unpleasant characters. It is the despair of the pious among Shakespeare's admirers that he sends all his villains to the grave without contrition, and his noble characters without religious edification.

Neither does prayer enter seriously into the scheme of life of anybody in the plays. When Falstaff lies dying and speaks of God, Mrs. Quickly tells him there's "no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet." Margaret confesses to Benedick, "I say my prayers aloud," as one of her ill points. "He is given to prayers" is the worst fault ascribed to Mrs. Quickly's peevish servant. "When thou hast leisure, say thy prayers," is the advice of Parolles to Helena. "Watch to-night, pray to-morrow," is Falstaff's motto. Costard chooses prayer only as the lesser evil —rather than "fast a week with bran and water," he would "pray a month with mutton and porridge." Hamlet says once he'll "go pray," but it looks like a stage device to leave the scene, if not a trick to end a long interview. Pompey sneers at the futility of prayer, while Richmond harangues the Lord as he

might Mars. Then there are Bolingbroke and Norfolk, in "Richard II," who appear to regard God as a sort of celestial referee of terrestrial broils, and use all their eloquence to drag him into the mêlée. Usually, when God is called upon, it is for the business of executing bloody vengeance, and once he is chided for neglect. "When did'st Thou sleep?" Queen-Mother Elizabeth asks in "Richard III," and gets from Margaret the blasphemous response:—

When holy Harry died and my sweet son.

As with prayer, so with oaths, Shakespeare's point of view seems to be sceptical. Not only Brutus, the pagan, but the Christian Diana in "All's Well That Ends Well," also declares that "oaths are words" and sanctity resides in truth alone.

XII

WAR OF THE CRITICS

Hippolyte Taine, the French historian of English literature, sees Shakespeare as a passive Atheist, a child of his age :—

> It was paganism which reigned in Elizabeth's court, not only in letters, but in doctrine—a paganism of the north, always serious, generally sombre, but which rested, like that of the south, on natural forces. From some, all Christianity was effaced; many proceed to Atheism from the excess of revulsion and debauchery, like Marlowe and Greene. With others, like Shakespeare, the idea of God scarcely makes its appearance; they see in our poor short human life only a dream, and beyond it the long, sad sleep; for them death is the goal of life; at most a dark gulf, into which man plunges, uncertain of the issue.....They speak like sceptics or superstitious men, never as genuine believers.

Taine's opinion is reflected by Raymond M. Alden, of Stanford University, in his recent volume on "Shakespeare." While he holds that Hamlet was religious, and that his "felicity" is in Heaven, he realizes that Shakespeare himself was "a normal artist of the Renaissance," the spirit of which, "a more than pagan spirit of secularity, concerned frankly with this present world.....might be definitely anti-religious, or, again, entirely compatible with a reserved minimum of fairly orthodox belief." Could

one whittle down a more graceful definition of a nothingarian?

Yet Ulrici's formidable piety revealed to the world that even "Midsummer Night's Dream" was meant as a sermon. George Steevens, on the other hand, was sadly shocked by Shakespeare's profanity, which also caused Johnson to grieve, especially when he read "Twelfth Night." It must be admitted, though Shakespeare may not have been "bearded like the pard," that he was "full of strange oaths"—Pandarus even swears by "God's lid." Charles Knight, a commentator who tried as hard to rescue Shakespeare from the attainder of infidelity as W. J. Birch to convict him, suppressed many of the oaths in his edition, imagined the description of Ephesus in the "Comedy of Errors" to be taken from Saint Paul, and assures us that the absence of religion in the works "ought to be attributed to a tender and delicate reserve about holy things, rather than to inattention or neglect." Falstaff and Launcelot are the most notable examples of such tender and delicate reserve conveniently forgotten by Knight. Biron, Launce, Gratiano, Beatrice —this quartette could chant a swelling anthem of impiety. Bible language often is parodied. Even the godly Henry V had left in him enough of the unregenerate Prince Hal to justify Johnson's protest —while "he prays like a Christian, he swears like a heathen."

Thus Shakespeare's religion is tossed to and fro between the extenuators and the deplorers. Bishop Warburton, anxious to save Shakespeare for the Church and the Church from ridicule, put many rough-shod passages into the margin of his edition,

with the excuse that "all this impious nonsense is the players', and foisted in without rhyme or reason." Blunt Sam Johnson, who did not know how to apologize, declares the passages are "too much in the manner of our author, who is sometimes trying to purchase merriment at too dear a rate."

The bump of reverence in Shakespeare's cranium was a valley. Even the "holy cross" is made the butt of punning in his "Comedy of Errors." To score a feeble laugh in "Henry V," he turns "Abraham's bosom" into "Arthur's bosom," and the Prodigal Son is used for a malapropism in the "Two Gentlemen of Verona." Samson, carrying the gates of Gaza, furnishes matter for fooling in "Love's Labour's Lost"; and Rosalind, in "As You Like It," makes it God's business to send beards for bare chins. Pistol, in the "Merry Wives of Windsor," parades as a "raven" to be fed by the Lord, but picks pockets rather than trust the Lord to provide. The irreverent quips in this farce seem to have been afterthoughts of Shakespeare, put in for good measure, to season the salad. Yet some commentators would convince us that, like Benedick, "the man doth fear God, howsoever it seems not in him, by some large jests he will make." The large jests are there, but the fear of God must be around the corner. Shakespeare, whether in the company of Hamlet or of Richard, cannot long be serious even when treating the most serious subjects.

George Brandes, the great Dane upon whom has fallen the mantle of Sainte-Beuve, supplies the mainspring of Shakespeare's religious laxity in these words:—

> So far as we can see, Shakespeare took no interest whatever in any of these ecclesiastical or religious movements. He came into contact with Puritanism only in its narrow and fanatical hatred of his art, and in its severely intolerant condemnation and punishment of moral and especially of sexual frailties. All he saw was its Pharisaic aspect and its often enough only simulated virtue. It was his indignation at this hypocritical virtue that led him to write "Measure for Measure."..... Shakespeare's burning wrath at the moral hypocrisy of self-righteousness underlies the whole structure like a volcano.

Sir Leslie Stephen supplies another motivation for the Bard's religious lukewarmness in his sense of humour, which was aroused by the absurdities of the strident schismatics :—

> Shakespeare, we know, read Montaigne; and if, like Montaigne, he accepted the creed in which he was brought up, he would have sympathized in Montaigne's sceptical and humorous view of theological controversialists playing their fantastic tricks of logic before high Heaven. Undoubtedly he despised a pedant, and the pedantry which displayed itself in the wranglings of Protestant and Papist divines would clearly not have escaped his contempt.

Johnson declared he would like to have heard the conversion of the Duke in "As You Like It," but Shakespeare did not share Johnson's pious desire. Religious discourse is called "unprofitable chat" by Mortimer in "Henry IV," and Hotspur styles it "skimble-skamble stuff." According to Thersites "the common curse of mankind is folly and ignorance," and according to Hector "modest doubt is called the beacon of the wise."

Halliwell-Phillipps, a careful student whose "Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare" laid the foundations

for all future biographies, sums up the entire issue in these words:—

> It is anything but necessary to conclude that the great dramatist had very strong or pronounced views on theological matters. If that were the case, it is almost certain that there would have been some other early allusion to them, and perhaps in himself less of that spirit of toleration for every kind of opinion which rendered him at home with all sorts and conditions of men—as well as less of that freedom from inflexible preconceptions that might have affected the fidelity of his dramatic work. Many will hold that there was sufficient of those qualities to betray a general indifference to creeds and rituals.....There is nothing in the will, in the list of witnesses, in the monumental inscription, in selection of friends, in the history of his professional career, in the little that tells of his personal character—there is nothing, in short, in a single one of the contemporary evidences to indicate that he ever entered any of the circles of religious partisanship.

Ignatius Donnelly, firmly astride his Baconian hobby-horse, supplies a swift solution of the Bard's religious neutrality:—

> There was a deeper reason for the indifference of the real author of the plays to the passions and quarrels of Catholics and Protestants. It was this: he did not believe in the doctrines of the Christian religion.

The fact that we have four prayers, some metrical psalms, a confession of faith, and a kind of tract on "The Characters of a Believing Christian" among Lord Bacon's writings does not impair the validity of Donnelly's opinion, as it applies to the "real author of the plays." Based upon circumstantial and cumulative though negative evidence, internal and external, eked out by inference from what we know of Shakespeare and his age, that opinion seems quite plausible.

XIII

SQUARING OF THE CREEDS

Concerning the cardinal doctrine of Christianity, original sin, upon which rests the whole scheme of salvation, a clear and emphatic denial seems to be entered through the mouth of an Athenian Senator, speaking to Alcibiades in "Timon of Athens":—

> All have not offended:
> For those that were, it is not square to take
> On those that are, revenge. Crimes, like to lands,
> Are not inherited.

So, too, in the "Winter's Tale," speaking of the "imposition hereditary," Polixenes declares: "We should have answered Heaven boldly, 'Not guilty.'" As to the Atonement, the other cardinal point of Christian doctrine, Malcolm alludes in obvious irony to the wisdom of such a plan—

> To offer up a weak, poor, innocent lamb,
> To appease an angry God.

To be Christlike is usually construed as meekness and loving one's enemies—an ethical ideal about which students of human nature have always had doubts. We find this doctrine of non-resistance also flouted in the Timon tragedy by Alcibiades as a surrender of justice. Brutus, too, vents his contempt of

> Old feeble carrions, and such suffering souls
> That welcome wrongs.

Paul Gibson, in a Cambridge Prize Essay on "Shakespeare's Use of the Supernatural," paints him as the simple child of a superstitious age, his credulity embracing even fairies and witches, but makes the amazing admission that "we have no grounds for believing that he had any real faith in the dogmas of the Church." And Goldwin Smith declares that "we cannot help feeling that we are in contact with a mind more like that of Giordano Bruno, or rather that of the Elizabethan Liberals [Raleigh, Sidney, Fulke Greville], than that of an orthodox Anglican divine." Then John Ruskin, in "Sesame and Lilies," comparing the religious spirit of Homer and Shakespeare, has these significant words:—

> What is the message to us of our own poet and searcher of hearts, after fifteen hundred years of Christian faith have been numbered over the graves of men? Are his words more cheerful than the heathen's—is his hope more near, his trust more sure, his reading of fate more happy? Ah, no! He differs from the heathen poet chiefly in this: that he recognizes, for deliverance, no gods nigh at hand..... the strongest and most righteous are brought to their ruin, and perish without word of hope.

Attempts to make Shakespeare out as a believer are in the same category as attempts to prove Bacon was the author of the plays. This is strikingly shown in the latest and in many respects most comprehensive "Life of William Shakespeare," that of the Cornell Professor, Joseph Quincy Adams. Amid all the infinitesimal details of his laborious and scholarly volume, in 550 crowded pages of fact and inference, there is not a single allusion to the Baconian authorship or to Shakespeare's religion. We are left to

infer that both are negligible and non-existent—they have nothing to do with Shakespeare, who was a child of the Renaissance, which had put Jehovah with Zeus and Osiris. It was an age which gathered æsthetic honey from all mythologies and rejected the eschatological hebenon.

It was an age of slashing doubt. It was the age of Kepler, who drove from Heaven the angels piloting the celestial spheres—the age of Galileo, who pushed Heaven itself back beyond the reach of his impious telescope. It was the age of Giordano Bruno, the martyr of Pantheism, who was in London two or three years, just before Shakespeare came there. It was the age of the great navigators who sailed around the globe and demolished the square box in which Cosmas Indicopleustes had neatly arranged earth, sun, moon, and stars. It was the age in which Sir Walter Raleigh —soldier, sailor, courtier, poet, "the glass of fashion and the mould of form"—was accused of being an Atheist. Every Churchman with a pen was writing tracts and treatises against unbelief, so perhaps there was much truth in the deathbed murmurings of the Earl of Essex, at Dublin in 1576, that "there was nothing but infidelity, infidelity, infidelity; Atheism, Atheism; no religion, no religion." It was an age that went quite as far as any age could go before Darwin and Strauss had equipped the armoury of Agnosticism. How far it went is clear from Richard Baines's note among the Harleian MSS. accusing Marlowe of Atheism, of teaching that history goes back 16,000 years, but Adam only 6,000; that religion was only to keep men in awe, and Moses was merely a juggler; and that "all protestantes are Hypocritical1

asses," and that Scripture contains "a number of contrarieties."

Into this age, its ferment and dissent, Shakespeare was born. His home influences were hardly pietistic, as his father once got an official reprimand for laxity in church attendance, and his uncle Harry was no better. Will came to London and associated with members of an ungodly profession; not only Marlowe, but three other fellow dramatists—Greene, Nash, and Kyd—were charged with Atheism. And we find the Nietzschean ethics ascribed to Marlowe boldly echoed by both Hamlet and Richard. The one says: "Nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so"; while the other declares that

> Conscience is but a word that cowards use,
> Devised at first to keep the strong in awe.

XIV

"THIS WAS A MAN!"

"KYNDE KIT MARLOWE" certainly was an Atheist, yet he was the friend of Shakespeare, who seems to have revered him as the greatest poet of the age, and addresses him as "Dead Shepherd" in the only lines of the plays that contain allusion to a contemporary poet. If Marlowe was Shakespeare's friend, it would have been a miracle of grace—and Shakespeare several times assures us miracles are past—if he had become a devout and believing Christian. No unbiassed writer or calm critic claims him as such. Canon Beeching was convinced that "he held very liberal opinions on the subject of religion." Despite his cloth, another clergyman, John Richard Green, foremost of modern English historians, writes thus of Shakespeare:—

> It is hard to say whether he had any religious belief or no. The religious phrases which are thinly scattered over his work are little more than expressions of a distant and imaginative reverence. And on the deeper grounds of religious faith his silence is significant. He is silent, and the doubt of Hamlet deepens his silence about the after-world. "To die," it may be, was to him, as to Claudio, "to go we know not whither." Often as his "questionings" turn to the riddle of life and death, he leaves it a riddle to the last, without heeding the common theological solutions around him. "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep."

Is this Prospero Shakespeare, or Omar FitzGerald? The very spirit of Omar broods over many of the characters in the plays. When Edgar, in "King Lear," says:

> Men must endure
> Their going hence, even as their coming hither;
> Ripeness is all;

we seem to hear the Tentmaker of Naishapur:

> What, without asking, hither hurried *Whence*?
> And, without asking, *Whither* hurried hence!

save that Shakespeare, instead of the grape's anodyne, points to the wisdom of using this life well, as the best preparation for whatever is to come. Through the mists of death's horizon he sees no beckoning stars of golden morn, nor glare of penitential pyre; he knew not what city lay in the estuary of his Nile, but with stout heart and calm-eyed he set sail, his bark piled with fruits and garlands. Unlike Omar, he takes on board no "jug of wine" to fortify his soul; on the other hand, he appears to regard alcohol as a potent incentive to piety. Cassio gets drunk—and religious. He even uses a phrase from the Lord's Prayer to raise a laugh. Trinculo gets drunk—and religious, also larding his speeches with the Lord's Prayer.

To the student of religious origins this is fraught with significance. Shakespeare had given thought to the emotional element in religion. He saw the genesis of faith in the exodus of reason. As to fundamental factors—economic, physical, and psychological—these are recognised in the bluntest language. In "Timon of Athens" gold is called a "visible god," which will "knit and break religions." Lafeu speaks of the

"unknown fear," and Iachimo tells Posthumus, "I see that you have some religion in you, that you fear." The influence of sex is indicated in the "Winter's Tale" by the Gentleman speaking of Perdita; let a beautiful woman start a sect, and all the men will follow, is his recipe for proselyting. In "Midsummer Night's Dream" belief is pointedly referred to will and desire, not proof and fact—"such tricks hath strong imagination." In "Titus Andronicus" we hear that "an idiot holds his bauble for a god." Religions true and false are as froth and foam to Lear—

> packs and sects
> That ebb and flow by the moon.

And all "packs and sects" were alike to Shakespeare. Elze, a critic of equal industry and acumen, comes to the definite conclusion that

> Shakespeare's religious objectivity—and, we may add, his moral objectivity as well—prove that his point of view was above all Christian doctrines, and as far removed from the Protestant as from the Catholic dogmas—in other words, his point of view was humanity.

Perhaps Shakespeare was too deeply interested in humanity to bother his head about divinity. As Dowden, very prettily, has put it, "a woman is dearer to Shakespeare than an angel; a man is better than a god." To Shakespeare the world was a great moving panorama of passions, hopes, despairs, appetites, aspirations, joys, dreams, and graves, among all which he saw the human family buffeted like little birds in a tempest. But he was human, like old Chremes, and so felt with all the tribes lit by the eternal sun. And

that is why we, also being human, feel with him. That is why he has power to move us, not by the golden pomp of rhetoric, but by the simple touch of sympathy. Like Brutus, he was a man. He had sinned and suffered. He had known the crucifixion of failure and the transfiguration of triumph. Juliet had kissed him, and Katharine had curst him, and Cressida had cozened him. He had drunk deep with Falstaff, played merry pranks with Puck, clutched the air-drawn dagger of Macbeth, and gone to Wittenberg with Horatio. The greatest of all our anthropologists, he had no time left for metaphysics. He taught men, says the historian Samuel R. Gardiner, to appraise the worth of man by what he is, and not by the dogmas which he accepts. He accepted no dogmas himself; he could not have burned heretics like his great contemporaries Calderon and Lope de Vega. Nor could he have mocked cruelly at things held holy by simple faith, like Voltaire and Heine. He was divinely neutral, being himself profoundly human. The little pedantries of the cloister, cobwebs in mental caves, he swept away with the vigorous broom of large and full life, the free breeze of the wide world. Such he was, universal, magnanimous, tall-statured, glad, serene—the mirror of mankind, the focus of history, the mountain-top of the ages. All the generations of history came trooping down the starry corridors of time to bring him pebbles and pearls for the mosaic of his dreams. The psychology of the future may find herein a parallel of Haeckel's law, that ontogeny reproduces phylogeny. His brain was like a port to which the golden galleons of the past carried their cargoes of thought from all the brains of all the

centuries. He was able to assimilate them all because he epitomized them all. He was the Man. The essence of all Shakespearean criticism might be concentrated in this one sonnet:—

TO MY BOOKBINDER.

Bind me my books in stuffs and hues that mean
Something, not in a mute and formal guise;
Let every cover hide some keen surprise
To shadow forth the volume's soul unseen.

Habit good Whitman in a garb of green;
Red gold for rare old Plato, dreamer wise;
A *mouchoir* for my Musset's streaming eyes;
Spenser the gossamer gown of faerie queene.

And bind my Wycherley in hide of swine;
My Burns in homely borrel, stout and strong;
A crazy-patch Verlaine's absinthine song,
And royal purple Marlowe's mighty line.
But—nothing else were fit to case him in—
Bind up Will Shakespeare in a human skin.

RARY
SCHOOL
RELIGION

INDEX

Adams, Joseph Quincy, 66
Alden, Raymond M., 60
Andrewes, Lancelot, 12
Arnold, Matthew, 19, 36
Atonement, 65

Bacon, Francis, 23, 64, 66
Bagehot, Walter, 34
Baines, Richard, 67
Bale, Bishop, 13
Barrymore, John, 51
Beeching, Canon, 69
Bible Versions, 16
Birch, W. J., 29, 34, 61
Black, William, 2
Boccaccio, 4
Bowden, Father, 9
Bradley, A. C., 4
Brandes, George, 28, 62, 63
Brown, Armitage, 21
Bruno, Giordano, 38, 66, 67
Bullock, Rev. Charles, 20
Burgess, William, 18
Burns, Robert, 20

Calderon, 72
Campanella, 31
Cardano, Geronimo, 39
Carter, Dr. Thomas, 7, 18
Catullus, 39
Celsus, 4
Chasles, Philarète, 25
Chateaubriand, 6, 9
Clough, A. H., 43
Coke, Sir Edward, 31
Cole, Peter, 38
Coleridge, S. T., 2, 19, 29, 31
Collins, Churton, 54, 56
—— William, 30
Combe, Dom Thomas, 6
Comstock, Anthony, 3
Cosmas Indicopleustes, 67
Cromwell, Oliver, 35

Dane, Clemence, 1
Darwin, Charles, 22
Davies, Richard, 9, 10
Dee, John, 49
Dickens, Charles, 27
Donnelly, Ignatius, 64
Dowden, Edward, 71
Doyle, Sir A. C., 45
Dumas, Alexandre fils, 1

Elze, Karl Friedrich, 28, 53, 71
Emerson, 4
Epitaph, 22–3
Erasmus, 9
Essex, Earl of, 67
Euripides, 54

Faust, 48
Fay, Rev. Sigourney, 7
FitzGerald, Edward, 40, 70
Foxe's "Book of Martyrs," 12

Galileo, 67
Gardiner, S. R., 72
Gervinus, G. G., 57
Gibson, Paul, 66
Godwin, William, 5
Goethe, 15
Gough, John B., 3
Grasset, Joseph, 47
Green, John Richard, 69
Greene, Robert, 50, 60, 68

Haeckel, Ernst, 72
Hakluyt, 12
Hall, Dr. John, 25
—— Rev. J. G., 20
Hallam, Henry, 31
Halliwell-Phillipps, 10, 26, 63, 64
Hansel, Howell, 51

Harris, Frank, 41
Harsnett, 7
Hazlitt, William, 34
Heine, Heinrich, 32, 72
Henri IV, 38
Henry VIII, 43
Hitchcock, Gen., 22
Hobbes, Thomas, 39
Holinshed, 12
Holmes, O. W., 27
Holy Ghost's coat, 17
Homer, 12, 25, 66
Hooker, Richard, 12
Horace, 22
Howell, James, 41
Hugo, Victor, 4

Ingersoll, Robert G., 4, 20

Jewel, Bishop John, 12
Johnson, Samuel, 10, 29, 53, 61, 62, 63

Katherine, Queen, 43
Keeler, Pierre, 51
Kepler, 67
Kett, Francis, 38
Knight, Charles, 18, 29, 31, 61
Kyd, Thomas, 68

Lambert, Father, 4
Laplace, 36
Lee, Sidney, 5, 10, 21, 24
Lilly, W. S., 6
Lodge, Thomas, 14
Lope de Vega, 72
Lorenzo, 9
Lucian, 30, 39
Lucretius, 39, 55
Magellan, 12
Malone, Edmund, 18
—— John, 37
Mansfield, Richard, 32
Marlowe, 1, 20, 55, 60, 67, 68, 69
Marprelate, Martin, 12
Martene, 7
Mathew, Frank, 7
Matthews, Brander, 3
Mediums, Spirit, 45, 47, 50, 51
Moleschott, Jakob, 55
Moliere, 30
Montaigne, 4, 25, 56, 63
Montégut, 8
Moschus, 39
Moulton, Richard Green, 52

Napoleon, 36
Nash, Thomas, 49, 68
Nietzsche, 30, 68
Non-resistance, 65

Omar Khayyam, 40, 70
Origen, 4
Original Sin, 65
Ovid, 12

Paine, Thomas, 20
Palladino, Eusapia, 47
Palmer, George H., 22
Peele, George, 50
Pius V, Pope, 7
Plato, 31
Plutarch, 12, 43
Prayer, 33, 58
Prayer-Book, 13, 20

Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, 33

Rabelais, 12
Raleigh, Walter, 31, 67
Richet, Charles, 48
Robertson, John M., 25, 55
Rogers, Rev. John, 27
Rolland, Romain, 39
Rubinstein and Bax, 1
Ruskin, John, 66

Sanchez, Guillèn, 8, 29
Santayana, George, 39
Saxo Grammaticus, 49
Schiller, 30
Schlegel, A. W., 42
Seibel, George, Sonnet, 73
Seneca, 37, 39
Servetus, Michael, 38
Shakespeare, Edmund, 24
—— Harry, 28, 68
—— John, 68
—— Judith, 2, 26
—— Susanna, 26

Shaw, Bernard, 1
Shelley, 34
Sidney, Sir Philip, 12, 66
Smiles, Samuel, 2
Smith, Goldwin, 3, 66
—— Silver-tongued, 12
Sonnets, 21, 37, 39
Sophocles, 56
Stapfer, Paul, 15
Steevens, George, 61
Stephen, Leslie, 63
Stockwood, Rev. John, 13
Straparola, 12
Sully, Duc de, 38
Swinburne, A. C., 9, 30
—— C. A., 18

Taine, Hippolyte, 41, 60
Tennyson, 30
Terence, 4, 71
Tolstoy, 5

Ulrici, Herman, 61
Utilitarianism, 56

Voltaire, 38, 72

Warburton, Bishop, 29, 30, 61
Wesley, John, 25
White, Richard Grant, 4, 16
Wilcocks, Rev. Thomas, 14
Will, Shakespeare's, 23–4
Wiseman, Cardinal, 8
Wittenberg, 46, 48
Wolff, Max J., 14
Wordsworth, Bishop, 18, 19

Young, Edward, 36

PRINTED BY WATTS AND CO., JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.

GTU Library
3 2400 00409 0985

DATE DUE

GAYLORD PRINTED IN U.S.A.

GTU Library
2400 Ridge Road
Berkeley, CA 94709
For renewals call (510) 649-2500
All items are subject to recall.